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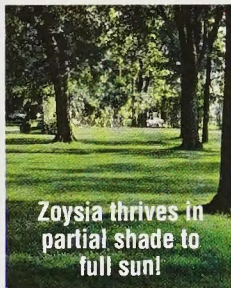


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"This is a yellow garden spider that I spotted in a bed of annuals by the front porch. Not only are they lovely to look at, they take care of things like mosquitoes." Photographed by Sandy Peckham, Wake Forest, a member of Wake Electric. Learn more about spiders on page 34.

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Viewpoints

Leading the Energy Future

By Jim Matheson



In February, leaders from your electric cooperative joined others from across the country in Nashville, Tennessee, to discuss key topics and trends at the 2018 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association annual meeting.

Throughout the meeting—under the theme “Leading the Energy Future”—one fact was clear: Electric cooperatives are uniquely positioned to lead the energy future while ensuring their members benefit from cutting-edge technologies. That’s because

we have a business model that can’t be beat. We are driven to exceed the needs and expectations of co-op members.

That goal has already taken us to great heights. But it has not changed our fundamental mission to provide reliable and affordable electricity. In fact, that mission is our springboard to the future.

The local control and unique community relationship empowers co-ops to be hubs of innovation where member demands and new technology can intersect—in many instances for the very first time.

The very nature of the electric industry is changing. And many cooperatives are on the cutting edge of this transformation, which gives consumers greater control over how they use electricity and access new energy options.

That’s why electric co-ops were among the earliest adopters of new technology to automatically detect outages and improve system reliability


while expediting power restorations.

Electric cooperatives across the nation are working to harness smart grid advances to provide consumers with new energy-saving opportunities.

Here in North Carolina, co-ops are using solar panels and Tesla batteries to pioneer new microgrid technology (see “The Agile, Fractal Grid,” page 10). The effort is one of several co-op projects across the nation to create small community grids that can function independently and enhance reliability.

And as they continue to lead the energy future, electric co-ops across the country are working to bring broadband internet to their communities, creating jobs and boosting rural economies. This connectivity serves two fundamental purposes: bridging the digital divide for co-op members and enhancing the co-op business operation network, improving

their ability to offer new energy management options to members.

Electric co-ops are driven by close ties to their local communities. As part of this commitment, co-ops are taking meaningful steps to make the energy future a possibility for each of their members. 

Jim Matheson is CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), the national service organization that represents the nation's more than 900 private, not-for-profit, consumer-owned electric cooperatives.



THIS MONTH'S ISSUE:

The Garden Guide

It's warming up out there, and although we may still get a late-season cold snap, there's no better time to start making plans for this year's garden. As always, our annual Carolina Country Gardens guide is here to provide a little inspiration—packed with gardening tips and ideas. Also, don't miss the national coverage of our very own co-op microgrid, beginning on page 10.

—Scott Gates, editor

Trans Fats Concern

The article in your February issue, “Undeniable Truths of Heart Health” (page 16), concerned me. [Dietician Sonya Angelone] stated that margarine has trans fats.

Due to family history of high cholesterol, I stopped using butter many years ago and went to using Smart Balance. It is a soft margarine in a container. It states it has no trans fats. Smart Balance also makes a soft margarine with olive oil in it.

I cannot believe that this is a bad margarine in comparison to butter with all its animal fats. I believe she is mistaken on her trans fats in soft margarine.

Darlene Ackerman, Woodford, Virginia

Editor's Note: Thank you for writing in, Darlene. We forwarded your note to Sonya Angelone, who had this explanation:

Regular margarine is not the same as “soft margarine.” The article states that margarine has trans fats. To stay solid at room temperature, vegetable oils, which are liquid at room temperature, are hydrogenated to make them more solid, which creates trans fatty acids that can raise LDL, or bad cholesterol. Otherwise,

margarines, which are made from liquid oils, would be liquid at room temperature. They need some type of solid or saturated fat. So margarines either contain partially hydrogenated oils, aka trans fats, or naturally saturated fats like palm oil, palm kernel oil or coconut oil—all harmful saturated fats, even though they may be used instead of trans fats.

Soft spreads packaged in a tub are generally much healthier for your heart, because they contain less saturated fat than margarine sticks. However, they should not be considered a healthy food. The healthiest option may be to skip both the butter and the margarine. Use monounsaturated fat instead: olive oil for dipping bread or vegetable oil for cooking.



That Tree, That Sky

A reader shared correspondence with Mark Hirsch, photojournalist and author of the book “That Tree,” as well as “Get the Perfect Shot with your Smartphone” in our January issue (page 18):

Dear Mark,

I became aware of you initially by the magazine's printing of your Tree picture and article about you. Now I saw the latest article about your advice using iPhone cameras (“Smartphone Photography 101” available at carolinacountry.com/extras). I am new to cell phones of any kind, so I still fumble my way around basics, but I enjoyed your information.

However, the item I meant to bring to your attention is that your Tree photographs inspired me so much that at the time I decided to replicate this action in some form. I have too many trees on my property, so a tree was out. But then I remembered how I always admired the different sky and cloud pictures here, especially from one spot on my deck, which does not give me much of sky view, just a small segment.

So for several weeks I went outside daily at about the same time and with a very ordinary, idiot-proof camera (a gift from my son who knew how awful I was with handling cameras), I shot numerous cloud scenes. Eventually I got tired of watching the clock, and also not making it in time. So I quit the precise place and time photography, but simply on my walks down and back part of my dead-end street shot sky pictures at various times of the day. But many of them around sunset.

You are correct—just before, at or after sunset and sunrise are the greatest picture-taking times.

Thank you for the inspiration.

*Renate Dahlin, Raeford
A member of Lumbee River EMC*

Hello Renate,

Wonderful to hear from you! Too fun that you saw my article in Carolina Country. I love the co-op business philosophy, so it was fun to write an article for them.

Happy to learn you found inspiration from my project. Keep on making photos that make you happy!

*Smiling,
Mark*

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Experiencing a power outage?

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'Expert Tree Feller' Causes Randolph EMC Outage

Nationally, about 10 percent of electric co-op power outages are caused by animals. North Carolina's electric co-ops deal with their share of animal-related outages, including those from squirrels, birds, snakes, raccoons, nesting insects—even cows (which get some amount of satisfaction from scratching their backs on the guy-wires used to add stability to power poles).

"Animal related outages can certainly be unique," said Dale Lambert, CEO of Asheboro-based Randolph EMC. "We had a member a few years ago who was experiencing a higher than usual number of outages. When we investigated, we found that his large bull had been rubbing against the guy-wire in his pasture, causing the conductor to hit together and blow the fuse on his line. To this date, he still thinks I was shooting him a line of—well, you know. But I



witnessed it with my own eyes when I worked in the field as a lineman."

Randolph EMC added a new one to its list on December 12.

"At 9:55 that morning, a large outage occurred, affecting 377 members in the Eastwood/ Murdocksville area of Moore County. Our crews responded to the outage to find a tree on the three-phase line," Lambert said. "This, in and of itself, is not unusual. But the reason the tree fell was unusual. One of the expert tree fellers of the animal kingdom—a beaver—turned out to be the culprit."

The perpetrator left irrefutable evidence at the scene (above). Randolph EMC crews responded quickly, however, and power was restored in 37 minutes.



Wind vs. Water

A new leader in renewable generation is emerging

Hydroelectric power, generated by moving water, is the granddaddy of renewable electricity generation. Hydropower was first used to generate electricity in the United States in the early 1880s at small plants in Michigan, Wisconsin and New York, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). And of course, water had turned milling wheels for centuries leading up to its electric applications.

Since those early applications, hydropower grew to be the leading source of renewable generation in the United States, holding its position through the 1900s and up to today.

But don't write off other sources of renewable generation just yet. U.S. wind power—the second-largest source of renewable generation (also first utilized for electricity generation in the 1880s)—has been growing steadily over the past 20 years.

Which will come out on top? For next year, EIA is betting on wind.

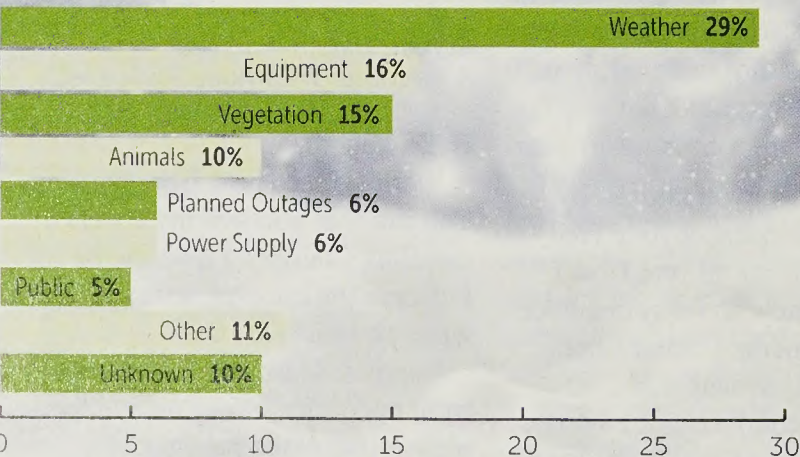
"Because few new hydro plants are expected to come online in the next two years, hydroelectric generation in 2018 and 2019 will largely depend on precipitation and water runoff," EIA said. "Although changes in weather patterns also affect wind generation, the forecast for wind power output is more dependent on the capacity and timing of new wind turbines coming online."

And with wind power capacity expected to increase by 8.3 gigawatts (GW) this year and 8 GW in 2019, an estimated 6.9 percent of U.S. generation will come from wind in 2019. Compare that with the estimated 6.6 percent coming from hydropower during that period, and odds are good that wind will become the leading source of renewable generation in 2019.

Causes of Co-op Power Interruptions

Power outages may be caused by car accidents damaging poles or other unknown factors. But bad weather remains the primary cause.

Percentage per number of interruptions



Source: National co-op data from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association; Percentages for each cause are averages and will not total 100%.

Electric Co-ops Raise Funds for NC Jaycee Burn Center

Helping survivors find their place in the world, teaching children to prevent burns, advancing scientific knowledge of burn treatment: These are all things the North Carolina Jaycee Burn Center does in addition to saving lives and providing compassionate care to patients.

In support of that work and mission, North Carolina's electric cooperatives recently presented a donation of \$146,193 to the North Carolina Jaycee Burn Center, a division of the UNC Department of Surgery. (See February 2018, page 10, for a full list of donors.)

"The Burn Center provides an incredible service in our state, and one that is especially appreciated by electric cooperatives whose linemen face dangers on the job every day," said Dale Lambert, CEO of Randolph EMC and a member of the Burn Center advisory board. The funding



(Left to right) Dr. Bruce Cairns, medical director of the NC Jaycee Burn Center; Dr. Melina Kibbe, chair of the UNC Department of Surgery; Lindsey Listrom, communications manager for North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives; Dale Lambert, CEO of Randolph EMC and Burn Center Advisory Board member; Wes Gooze, U.S. Airways and chair of the Burn Center Advisory Committee; Lonnie Moore, SVP and COO of the Tarheel Electric Membership Association.

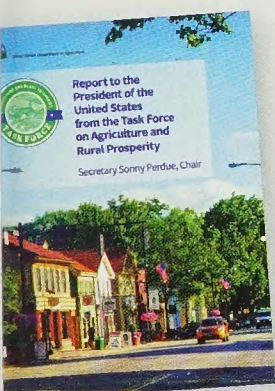
was raised at the co-ops' 19th annual golf tournament and fundraiser in October. Electric cooperatives, in partnership with more than 80 organizations and individuals, have donated more than \$1.8 million to the Burn Center over the years. That support has helped the Chapel Hill-based Burn Center become one of

the leading comprehensive burn centers in the world.

"The magnitude of the investment you make is outstanding," Dr. Bruce A. Cairns, medical director of the NC Jaycee Burn Center, said in accepting the donation.

—Lindsey Listrom, North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives

Federal Task Force Gives Nod to Co-op Smart Grid Work



A recent task force report commissioned by the White House outlines policy changes that would promote economic development in rural America, while noting the importance of e-connectivity and electric cooperative efforts

to facilitate it. U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue unveiled the report in January at the American Farm Bureau's annual convention in Nashville, Tennessee.

The report sees robust and reliable e-connectivity is a critical ingredient for rural prosperity, including the deployment of smart grid technology throughout rural power systems.

"Rural electric cooperatives have begun deploying fiber optic networks throughout their service areas to

meet the current, growing and future demand for smart grid services, such as demand-side management, distributed generation and renewable integration, and smart home technologies, as well as increased grid security," the task force report said. "The ability to dynamically manage energy use is critical to ensuring network reliability, enhancing system-wide efficiency and keeping electric rates affordable for rural residents and businesses. The high-speed networks, connecting electric system infrastructure and even direct connections to customer locations, can also provide a platform and catalyst for fiber to rural homes."

As of 2014, 39 percent of the rural population lacked access to broadband at speeds necessary for advanced telecommunications and data transfer capability, according to the report.

Recommendations presented to President Trump include:

- Establish executive leadership to expand e-connectivity across rural America;
- Assess the state of rural e-connectivity;
- Reduce regulatory barriers to infrastructure deployment;
- Assess the efficacy of current programs; and
- Incentivize private capital investment.

"I appreciate the president starting this important conversation, and I commend Secretary Perdue for his leadership of the task force," said Jim Matheson, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. "America's electric cooperatives look forward to continuing the conversation and working together on technology and funding solutions that will enrich the lives of rural American families and businesses."



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CO-OP TECH:

The Agile, Fractal Grid

The Ocracoke microgrid project is paving the way for future innovation

By John Vanvig

The microgrid's 62 solar panels are capable of adding roughly 15 kW to the island's power supply.

Fewer than a thousand people live on Ocracoke Island, a narrow spit of land in North Carolina's Outer Banks, facing the Atlantic Ocean's breakers at the end of a three-hour ferry ride from the mainland. Some tallies put the number of year-round residents at fewer than 600 hardy souls.

Whatever the actual number, they're all co-op members, served by Pantego-based Tideland EMC and its power supplier, the North Carolina Electric Membership Corporation (NCEMC). They all live and work at the end of a transmission line that snakes along Hatteras Island to the north before plunging under the sea for 2 miles to tie Ocracoke's homes and businesses to the rest of North America. And they, and the thousands of seasonal visitors who fuel the island's economy, are all vulnerable to the threat of strong winds and turbulent seas from hurricanes and winter storms.

It would be hard to find a better place to design, build, and test a microgrid that can stand on its own when central-station power from the grid isn't available. For almost a year, since February 2017, that's what NCEMC and Tideland have been doing.

Years ago, the two co-ops put in a 3-MW diesel generator to provide emergency power for the island, and the community's water and sewer system has backup power too. More recently, a few stores, shops, cafes, and homes have purchased small generators of their own to power their way through long interruptions.

Now, the Ocracoke microgrid project has seen the installation of 62 solar panels, which are capable of adding 15 kW to the island's supply. There's a new Tesla battery bank too, which can put an additional 500 kW into the island's grid for a couple of hours.

On the member side, controlled home thermostats and water heaters can shave the need for electricity without sacrificing comfort. They're deployed as needed during normal conditions and help conserve and extend power supplies during outages.

"It's a test project so that we can monitor the operations," says Lee Ragsdale, NCEMC's senior vice president of grid infrastructure & compliance. "We are operating the Ocracoke microgrid to test some of these devices and

procedures to see how they work together and share what we've learned with co-ops throughout the country."

What they'll learn and share will bring co-ops and the electric utility industry as a whole closer to the "agile, fractal grid," a concept proposed by Craig Miller, chief scientist at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), the service arm of the nation's 900-plus electric cooperatives.

The grid evolves

When it comes to the grid, "agile" means precisely that: nimble and fast in assessing and meeting the needs of electric consumers on a substation circuit or larger area affected by weather- or equipment-related service interruptions.

"Fractal" is a little less familiar term, but it's an equally important aspect of microgrids. It describes formations or assemblies that break down into subunits with all the same characteristics of the larger whole.

As explained in the 2014 report "Achieving a Resilient and Agile Microgrid," which Miller co-wrote with NRECA's David Pinney and two others, a large salt crystal is fractal. When smashed, it crumbles into smaller salt crystals, all of them identical except in size to the original. When immersed in water, the crystals aggregate back into a large one.

A fractal microgrid, then, would include generation to supply power within its boundaries, controls to dispatch that power to where it's needed (and shave demand where it's not), and the ability to re-integrate itself into the larger grid when time and repairs allow.

"The agile grid is designed around segmentation," the 2014 report explains. "Rather than building the grid as a monolith or hierarchy that operates as a unit, it is viewed as a collection of independent or semi-independent systems operating in a coordinated way."

In the three years since publishing the report, Miller says the industry has moved even closer to the model of agile, fractal microgrids.

Distributed generation through solar arrays, wind turbines, backup generators, gas-fired peaking plants, and other technologies has boomed. Energy storage, via larger water heaters, electric vehicles that recharge overnight, and home battery banks, is gaining traction too.

A good bit of work remains to be done on communication and control mechanisms, Miller concedes. Secure and reliable internet and other communications links must be established, and interoperability standards for controlling distributed energy resources, load controls, and power-flow switches still are in the early stages. But those developments, Miller says, are well under way.

"It's happening at dozens of utilities," he says. "The grid doesn't change overnight. It's big, it's complex, and we are responsible for developing it with integrity. So we make little changes, and the grid evolves."

That evolution is on display on Ocracoke.

When engineers get excited

The 3-MW diesel generator, installed well before the microgrid project, functions as a kind of baseload power source when transmission access from the mainland is down. It's supplemented by 15 kW of solar power and the battery bank.

Consumer-owned backup generation could eventually be incorporated into microgrid operation, Ragsdale says, though that will take further technical and business tweaks.

As Miller foretold, interoperability remains a challenge as the Ocracoke project matures.

"We spend as much time thinking about the communications between these devices as we do the flow of power," Ragsdale says.

There's a lot of communication links to think about. Data has to flow between generation and storage, between loads and the microgrid, and between all of that and control centers at Tideland and NCEMC.

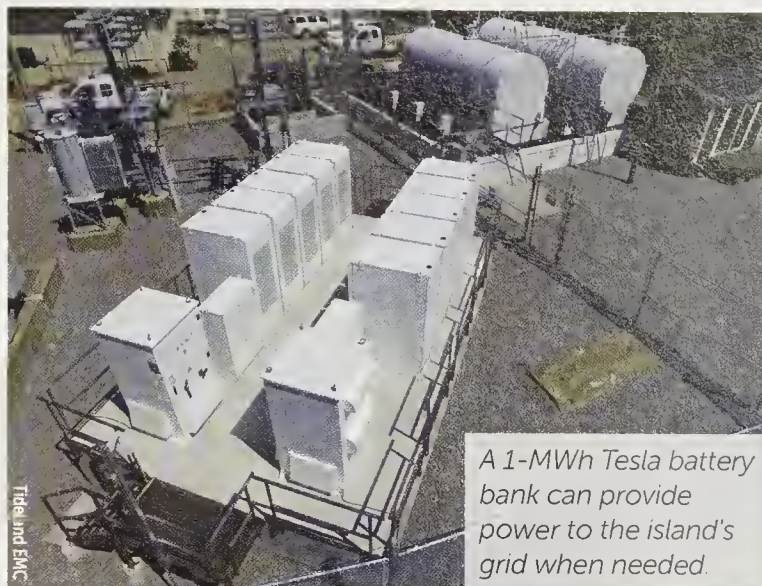
"There is no off-the-shelf software you can buy and make it work," says Ajaz Sadiq, NCEMC's vice president of grid modernization & technology integration. "You need more interfaces to get it accomplished, and it requires constant adjustment to make it work the way we want."

NCEMC can start the large diesel generator by remote control when needed, and staffers at Tideland's outpost are on standby to help out, Sadiq says.

Microgrid communication relies on the existing business and telemetry networks on site, he says. But a lot of custom-built work came after that.

"We had to program a remote unit to interface between NCEMC and the individual device controllers. There is a human/machine interface computer that is programmed to interface with SCADA for local monitoring. Additionally, we had to develop custom interfaces to control the microgrid through our energy management system located in Raleigh."

In the end, Sadiq believes the investment in systems design and development will pay off. "The time and effort was appropriate for a project of this scale," he says.



Ragsdale makes the same cost-benefit calculation.

"That's what we're focusing on: figuring out that interoperability and how we control these devices," he says. "One of the things that we've seen is that there's a lot of stability associated with the mass of the larger grid. When you have a microgrid, you don't have as much inertia on the system, so control becomes more complicated. That's when the engineers get really excited."


Baby steps

The Ocracoke Island microgrid project continues to evolve. The co-ops are testing how microgrid resources can provide benefits in normal conditions as well as when placed into service as an agile, fractal outlier.

"We have utilized these resources on multiple occasions," Ragsdale says. "So now you have additional resources that you can utilize month in and month out."

"Part of it is the reliability and resiliency aspect. Our [distribution co-op] members now have better reliability, and that adds value for their members. Ultimately, it's about continuing to innovate to provide even better service to our members, and keeping power affordable and reliable. Both of those things are in place," Ragsdale says. "We're taking baby steps into it, and as we grow, it'll make sense to do more. You crawl before you can walk before you can run."

And that, NRECA's Miller says, is the way the agile, fractal grid is appearing on the electric utility scene.

"We will never be able to say, 'This is the day that we're agile and fractal,'" he says. "We'll just get there over time. Every day, somewhere in this country, one of our co-ops—because they're very inventive people who work hard to deliver power—will try something. They'll make a tweak somewhere, and then they'll share those changes with each other. We are absolutely moving forward with the agile, fractal grid, today and every day." 

This article originally appeared in the January 2018 issue of RE Magazine, produced by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

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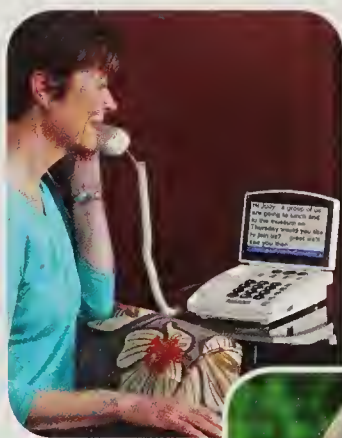
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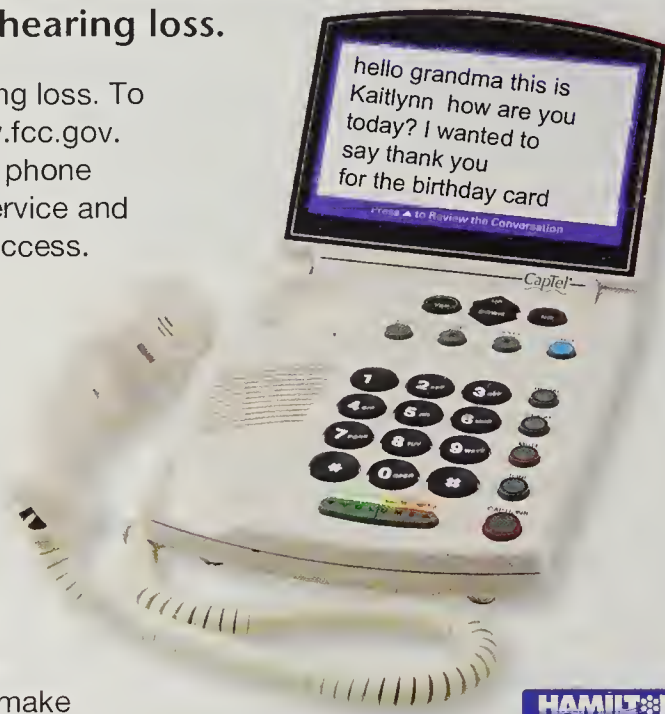
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Garden Hacks to Save Space & Money

Put straw bales and recycled wood pallets to use in your garden

By Pamela A. Keene

Seeds are cheap. But the costs associated with getting a garden to thrive can start to climb from there. If raised beds are needed or soil is poor, there are a few solutions that will get your greens growing without breaking the bank. Straw bales and wood pallets are two materials that are abundant, relatively inexpensive (or free) and versatile in a garden.

Straw Bales

For the residential gardener, especially one with poor soil or limited space, straw bale gardening is one innovative solution.

“Straw bale gardening is very straight-forward and productive,” says Joel Karsten, author of “Straw Bale Gardening Complete” and his 2018 book, “Straw Bale Solutions.” “You’re starting with a clean slate that’s disease- and insect-free, and no matter what kind of soil you have, you’re creating the optimal growing conditions for fruits, vegetables and flowers.”

Karsten first developed straw bale gardening nearly 30 years ago as a recent college graduate from the University of Minnesota with a degree in horticultural science. “We didn’t have a lot of money when I graduated, so we decided to grow our own vegetables,” he says. “Having grown up around farming, I noticed that a thistle plant was thriving in a broken bale of straw, so I thought, ‘Why not use the same technique for growing vegetables?’ The soil at our first home wasn’t that great, so we tried it, and it worked.”

As a scientist, research drove Karsten to grow a 50-bale test garden. “The roots responded well to the nutrients in the bales and the inner heat,” he says. “I reached out to my former professor who said he’d

be curious about my research, but for 14 years, no one seemed to care much about it.”

All that changed when a television reporter at a local station in Minneapolis did a story in 2005. “It exploded after that, and we’ve taken straw bale gardening around the world.”

Karsten has introduced the concept in Southeast Asia, Africa, Australia and even inside the Arctic Circle. “It has taken on a life of its own, both for homeowners and commercially,” he says. “And it has really caught on for people with poor soil or limited garden space. It’s like container gardening without the container with the convenience of raised beds and little need for weeding.”

Straw bale prep

Start with one or more bales of wheat straw, the kind that are held together with twine. Place the bales in a spot on your lawn, patio or deck where it can receive at least six hours of full sun daily. For the first 12–15 days, you’ll condition the bales with lawn fertilizer (make sure it has no herbicides or weed killers) and periodic watering.

Position the bales string-side down, cut edges exposed upward, and place bales end-to-end in rows. If you’re putting them on a patio or deck, place them on landscape cloth to


keep them neat. Leave about six feet between rows of bales for easy access and harvesting.

Each day, you’ll add more fertilizer, water or both, according to specific amounts, usually either ½ cup or ¼ cup per bale per day, followed by a soaking with water.

“It takes about two weeks to condition a bale,” Karsten says. “You’ll start seeing results of decomposition and the heat it generates by the end of the first week. A lot of biology happens in those bales.”

Bales are conditioned in much the same way compost is produced.



 carolinacountry.com/strawbales
Straw bale gardening isn’t foreign to avid Carolina Country readers. Find past articles and straw bale gardening tips on our website.

Bacteria feed on the nitrogen that's produced during decomposition, breaking down the straw and creating a nutrient-filled growing medium.

Planting your garden

Once the bale is properly conditioned, you can plant seeds or seedlings directly. Karsten recommends using seedlings for novice gardeners and those who want a quicker start.

"Be careful with planting seedlings after the 12th day," he says. "Stick a meat thermometer into the bale, and as long as the internal temperature is less than 105 degrees, it's safe to plant seedlings. You can add water to reduce the temperature."

Use a trowel to dig a hole in the top of each bale that's a little bigger than the root ball, removing any netting or peat pots, then place the seedling into the hole, following the suggested distance between plants on the label.

You can add some sterilized potting mix to fill in the gaps; it should be weed- and disease-free. Be sure to monitor the bales daily to maintain consistent moisture. If they feel dry several inches into the bale, water them. Running drip irrigation can help with watering consistently.

Continue to fertilize the bales as you would your in-ground vegetable garden.



Straw bale gardening makes the harvest more convenient. "It's like using raised beds," Karsten says. "You don't have to bend down to tend the plants or harvest your crops."

Some of the most popular crops are tomatoes, squash and peppers, but by installing a trellis on each bale, green beans, cucumbers and other vining or trailing plants will grow very well. But straw bale gardening isn't limited to vegetables.

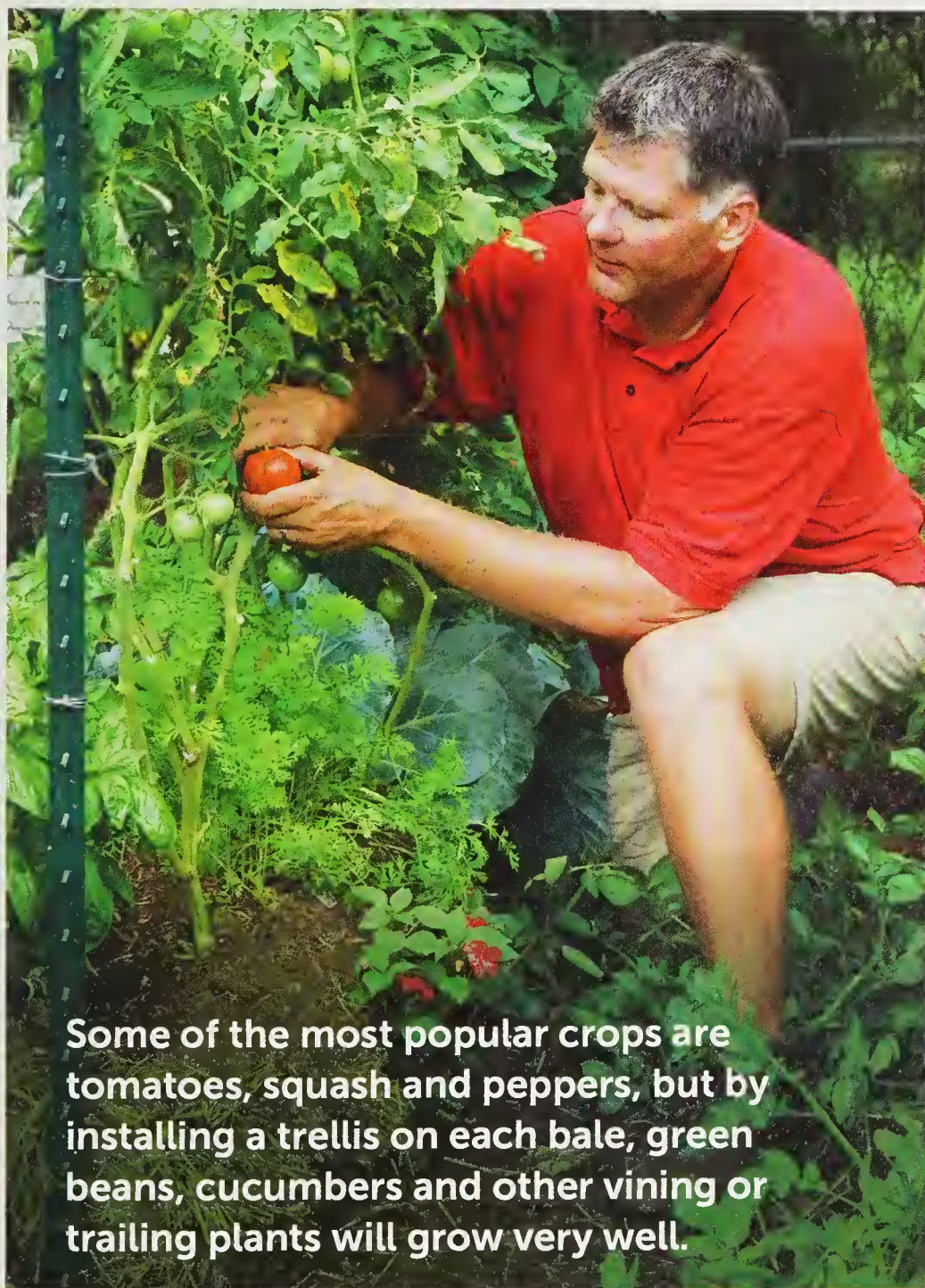
"People grow fruit like strawberries, herbs or flowers in straw bales," Karsten says. "Some people plant flowers or foliage annuals on the sides. Begonias and impatiens are good choices that will thrive alongside vegetables. And, it's really easy to grow a kitchen herb garden in a straw bale."

Admittedly, the straw bales will break down over the growing season.

"They're not the prettiest thing in the world, but they create beautiful mulch that you can use in planter boxes, add to your compost pile or use in your garden next season," he says. "Just take the strings out and push the straw into a pile. Then you can move it wherever you like."

Sometimes bales can be reused for a second planting if they've remained intact. If you've used landscape fabric beneath them, they're likely to hold up for a second season. But Karsten suggests starting each season with fresh bales to reduce the risk of disease.

"If you follow the basic directions, you'll have about a 70 percent success rate," he says. "And at least one-fourth of that will be bigger and better than your yield from traditional gardening."



Some of the most popular crops are tomatoes, squash and peppers, but by installing a trellis on each bale, green beans, cucumbers and other vining or trailing plants will grow very well.



Potted plant hanger

Wood Pallets

When it comes to repurposing materials for your garden, wood pallets can be the stars of the show. From creating vertical herb gardens for smaller spaces to making rugged, durable outdoor furniture, the versatility of wood pallets is limited only by the imagination.

"In the past few years, with the growing trends in upcycling, recycling and reuse, people have discovered that pallets are a versatile, free source of wood," says Joe Lamp'l, host of the PBS series "Growing a Greener World" and founder of joegardener.com.

"Whether you're using them for gardening projects or building furniture, pallet wood has a lot of character and is a great resource for DIY projects."

Pallet prep and safety

Many gardening projects make use of pallets just the way they are, without disassembling.



Look for heat-treated pallets (marked with an HT on the end of one of the 2-by-4 pieces) because they are safer and don't contain harmful chemicals.

"For a vertical herb garden or a plant hanger, there's no need to take the pallets apart," Lamp'l says. "However, if you're using them to grow food products, find out about the original use, making sure they haven't been pretreated with methyl bromide, a broad-spectrum pesticide that has been used to treat soil for pests, weeds and pathogens but that's highly toxic to humans. Look for heat-treated pallets instead because they are safer and don't contain harmful chemicals."

"Pallets made in the United States are typically heat-treated, and by law all pallets made within the past several years must be labeled as either MB for methyl bromide or HT for heat treated. The marking is generally on the end of one of the 2-by-4 pieces."

Lamp'l suggests pressure-washing pallets to remove any grime or dirt.

Disassembling pallets for projects can be tricky, but can yield very useful pieces of wood. A word about safety: wear safety goggles and work gloves to protect your eyes and hands.

"The most popular and simplest way is to use a reciprocating saw, sometimes called a Sawzall," Lamp'l says. "Fit it with a blade designed to cut metal, and you can just cut through the nails. You don't have to remove the nails, and you're less likely to split the boards."

You can also use a circular saw to cut the pallet wood from the 2-by-4 supports sawing perpendicular to the supports, then use a crowbar and hammer to remove the center stringers. You'll still need to remove the nails with a claw hammer.

"Depending on how you'll use them, once you've taken the pallets apart, sand them to remove splinters and create a smoother surface," Lamp'l says. "You'll have great wood for garden projects like raised beds



(see “Gardeners: Give Yourself a Raise,” page 20), compost bins, rugged potting benches and distinctive yet durable outdoor furniture.”

Pallet project ideas

Pallets are versatile. Here are four easy projects to try in your garden:

1 Vertical kitchen garden

Build this for greens or herbs by standing a clean pallet on end, creating triangle feet to keep it upright, filling it with good-quality potting or container soil, then planting seedlings between the slats. The slats on the front side of the pallet are a bit closer together than those on the back.

“For a one-sided vertical garden that you can either mount on a wall or add 2-by-4 braces to make it free-standing, stretch landscape fabric across the inside of the back and along bottom to help keep the soil in place,” Lamp’l says. He suggests planting garden herbs such as basil, dill, oregano, chives, parsley and thyme along with salad greens, lettuce, spinach and leafy crops. “Don’t be afraid to pack the soil tightly. You’ll also want to put your seedlings a bit closer together than if they were planted in an open garden bed.”



Pallet coffee table

Once it’s planted, put your vertical planter in a sunny, convenient location, and water it well. Monitor to keep it from becoming too dry, and feed it with liquid fertilizer according to the package instructions.

2 Potted plant hanger

Mount an intact pallet to a wall and then attach metal potted plant brackets, available online or at many big-box retailers, to create this hanger. For interest, paint the slats in cheerful colors and use varying-sized pots.

3 Compost bin

Tie three wooden pallets together with coat hangers to create a three-sided bin to contain a compost pile. Built out more bays by adding pallets (each bay can share a wall, so two more pallets will get you an additional bay).

“You don’t need any fancy equipment or tools to start a compost heap,” Lamp’l says. “Start with woody materials, branches or sticks that will aid in ventilation, then layer brown, then green materials, using a formula of roughly two-thirds brown and one-third green.”

Examples of green materials, which have a higher nitrogen content, include fresh grass clippings, pulled weeds and nonmeat, nonfat kitchen scraps such as vegetable and fruit peelings and cores, coffee grounds and used tea leaves. Brown

ingredients, those that furnish carbon that’s important to the decomposition process, include dried leaves, shredded cardboard or paper, small wood chips and dried grass clippings.

4 Pallet coffee table

Start this patio focal point by taking apart several pallets. Use two 2-by-4s for each leg, creating 4-by-4 legs. Use the slats to make the top, and face the sides with additional slats. Or, build a table up in layers, calling to mind the original design of the pallets (see photo). Then sand, stain or paint it, and finish with several coats of polyurethane.

“Pallets can be the basis for any number of projects,” Lamp’l says. “I’ve seen people create an indoor accent wall from pallet wood, build headboards or use the wood to frame artwork. Once you’ve discovered the versatility of wood pallets, you’re only limited by your imagination.”

Pamela A. Keene is a freelance writer and photographer based in Atlanta.

To learn more

Visit strawbalegardening.com for more information about straw bale gardening techniques.

Visit instructables.com (a website created more than a decade ago by two Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduates) for all kinds of DIY project ideas, including wood pallet projects.



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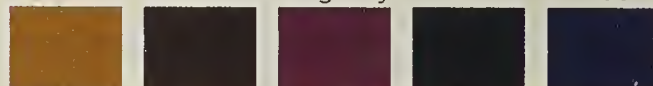
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Gardeners: Give Yourself a Raise

Elevated beds take gardening to the next level

Story and photos by L.A. Jackson

Want to maximize production in your edible and ornamental gardens this year? There are plenty of nifty tricks to prod plants into showing off their best efforts, but to me, probably one of the most effective ways is to simply give yourself a raise.

In this case, “a raise” simply means elevating planting beds. Raised beds are especially helpful for Carolina gardeners who struggle to baby plants in super sandy soils or gunky, thick clay. And instead of taking years and truck-loads of soil amendments to tame such inhospitable grounds, backyard planters will have quick relief in the short time it takes to construct such raised beds. Ergonomic relief also can be factored in—bending over these above ground gardens will certainly be much easier on a testy back.

So, are you ready to get growing with raised beds? For starters, think location, location, location. Elevated gardens will work best if they are sited away from large trees, which can send out their hungry, hairy feeder roots to compete with preferred plants for nutrients. Also, unless you are a lover of hostas, hellebores, iron plants and other such shade-lovers, let the sun shine on above-ground plant playpens, although for less heat stress in the summer, try to find a spot that is at least partially shaded from the hottest sunrays in the mid-to-late afternoon.

Building up

Looking to create a Colonial-style vegetable or herb garden? Rectangular raised beds are the way to go, and wooden walls will work well with them. But, while pressure treated wood products are no longer being made with the poisonous chromate copper arsenate, I’m still a bigger fan of naturally rot-resistant woods such as cypress or cedar—they are pricey, but they will last a l-o-o-o-n-g time.

Skinny lumber such as economical 1x6s or 1x8s will work, but over the years they could warp unless deeply anchored ground posts aren’t attached every 2 to 3 feet. Hefty 6x6s and 8x8s have fewer problems with the bends, and will tend to stay in place better by their sheer weight. I really don’t like using old railroad ties in raised beds for edibles; even though most of the preserving agent creosote is gone, it is still a big nasty that I don’t want plants I’m planning to chew on absorbing in any amounts.

For a productive height in veggie or herb beds, 6-inch-tall walls are often touted as the bare minimum, but on

terra firma plots that have never been struck with a shovel, based on my experience, better results with growable edibles now and in the years to come will be had with beds at least 12 inches above ground. This is especially true for root crops such as carrots, onions, radishes and turnips. Width matters as well—stretch the beds as long as Texas, if you want, but no more than 4 feet wide to minimize embarrassing face plants while reaching in for the harvestable goodies.

Beds for perennials and flowers also can be elevated within the confines of wooden timbers, but to introduce the visual aesthetics of curves, curls and swerves into a landscape design, brick or stone are excellent options. Bonding with mortar will create lasting walls, but care must be taken to allow for proper drainage. As an alternative, dry-stacking with bricks or stone is an easier DIY project, and it automatically solves any drainage problems. One more option, interlocking pavers, is tough to beat for strength and good drainage without the use of mortar.

Whatever material you use, resist building walls over 2 feet high because, not only will stability become an issue, but the whole project could easily take on the look of a bunker. Create staggered terraces for extra height. This wall-topping-wall

Raised beds are especially helpful for Carolina gardeners who struggle to baby plants in super sandy soils or gunky, thick clay.



Terraced beds can safely increase the height of a raised garden.



Dry-stack stone walls are easy to construct and visually appealing.



A Colonial-style raised herb garden being prepared for the new spring

approach will be much easier on the eyes and won't sacrifice structural strength. Terracing also allows plants to interact vertically, with weeping, crawling pretties spilling downwards while vigorous vines stretch their wandering ways up to higher levels.

Filling in

Once the walls are built, prepare the soon-to-be subsoil in the bottom of the beds. Remove any existing vegetation, and roughly turn over undisturbed dirt to open up plenty of additional easy avenues for future developing roots to explore. This step is especially important if you are gardening in clay that is hard enough to tap dance on, but whatever the soil's texture, such ground pounding also helps rid the area of unwanted roots and stones.

For small raised gardens, several bags of commercial garden dirt and soil conditioner from your local, friendly garden center will probably be enough to fill the beds. Bigger projects, however, often need trucks of dirt. While it is certainly tempting in price to just have a load of fill dirt brought in, resist this urge by asking yourself one simple question: Do you really want to take the chance of winding up with someone else's rocks, sticks and other assorted useless chunks of refuse? As a better option, check with nearby nurseries or landscaping businesses for screened topsoil. Also ask if they have processed compost available. If so, grab a truck-size heapin' helpin' of this garden "black gold," because it is a garden-given that most plants will grow

better in compost-enriched soil.

Fill the raised beds to within about 2 inches of the top. This will allow room for a layer of organic mulch, which can be added in the late spring to help retain ground moisture during dry spells as well as deflect the worst of the sun's heat on plant roots in the thick of the summer.

Mulch, like compost, will break down over the course of a growing season, causing the soil level to sink, but this, as Martha Stewart says, is a good thing—it simply leaves space for more beneficial organic ingredients to be added to your new raised beds next year! 🌱

L.A. Jackson is the former editor of Carolina Gardener Magazine. Read his Carolina Gardens column on page 42.



Rethinking Community Gardens

A traditionally urban concept is taking root in rural communities

By Tina Vasquez | Photos by Diana McCall unless otherwise indicated

It is a heartbreaking irony that in many rural and farm communities—the same that grow crops to feed the nation—food scarcity is an overwhelming problem. Nationwide, 2.7 million rural households face hunger, according to the hunger relief organization Feeding America.

North Carolinians are by no means immune to this issue. Between 2010 and 2016, North Carolina has regularly ranked among the top 10 states with the highest percentage of citizens experiencing food shortages, according to Feeding the Carolinas.

“Food security is a concern that touches every corner of our state, including agricultural rural areas,” says Don Boekelheide, the former chair of North Carolina Community Garden Partners (NCCGP), a nearly 10-year-old nonprofit that serves as a network of gardeners and educators.

The statewide group recently partnered with the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), a Pittsboro-based organization that cultivates practices and policies that support family farms. For some of NCCGP’s board members, this new collaboration can be an important step in addressing food scarcity in rural North Carolina, but it will require rethinking community gardens.



Bricks Healthy Lifestyles Garden in Whitakers

Adopting an urban idea

In the United States, community gardens are often discussed in the context of urban areas, where they function as an educational tool for children and a way to make fresh produce available to those who struggle with food scarcity. This is true in North Carolina, as well, where communities of color in areas like east Winston-Salem are pushing for the creation of “agrihoods,” turning vacant city lots into bountiful plots of fruits and vegetables to benefit surrounding neighborhoods.

Boekelheide says this idea of community gardens being synonymous with cities likely dates back to these gardens’ origins—they first emerged during World War I as Liberty Gardens, and again during World War II as Victory Gardens.

“It was a group of active citizens cleaning up a vacant lot and replacing trash and junk with nutritious veggies and beautiful flowers,” he explains. “There’s still some truth to this idea, with large cities like New York and Philadelphia having vast networks of active gardens and gardeners.”

NCCGP became a project of RAFI in early 2017, and the network is still working to find its footing and focus, with leadership in flux and questions remaining about how best to engage rural communities around community gardening.

This is something Diana Schmitt

McCall says she thinks about a lot.

McCall is the director of the Dr. John Wilson Community Garden in Black Mountain, one of 249 community gardens registered for free with NCCGP.

The town of Black Mountain has effectively given McCall creative autonomy, but all of her efforts are informed by the garden’s founder, Dr. John Wilson, and his guiding mission: Everything the garden does must provide a place for people in the community to learn about food and not just grow food, but grow enough food to share.

Currently, about 80 families utilize the garden to grow food, with 10 percent of each of their plots earmarked for donations. McCall also oversees two donation programs that last year resulted in the donation of 4,000 pounds of food.

The benefits of being in the NCCGP are clear for gardeners who are working in relative isolation, according to McCall. It can shorten the learning curve enormously, she says, allowing those new to community gardening to learn from others’ mistakes instead of making their own. But NCCGP’s new



carolinacountry.com/extras

The Dr. John Wilson Community Garden in Black Mountain is a member of Gardens That Give WNC, a regional association of philanthropic gardens that grow food for donation. Watch a video on our website to learn more.

Left: Dr. John Wilson Community Garden added a sandbox in an effort to involve children.

partnership with RAFI has McCall rethinking whether the traditional idea of a community garden is the right model for rural North Carolina.

Feeding the multitude

McCall grew up on 50 acres in a rural area, and her family, like many in rural North Carolina, primarily interacted with people who attended her church. While she is hesitant to “speak boldly” on rural communities without a broader understanding of their individual needs, she could see how creating a secular community garden in a rural area may not make a lot of sense.

“Rural areas in North Carolina have churches, and churches have land. So moving forward, what makes sense to me is partnering with churches,” McCall said. “Rural areas also have

continued on page 24



Past intern Kevin Todd holds a crate of greens headed to nonprofit produce distributor Bounty and Soul.



Currently, about 80 families utilize the Dr. John Wilson Community Garden. And the occasional black bear that ambles through...



Phyllis Malcolm and Kip Pritchard harvest from plots earmarked for donation.



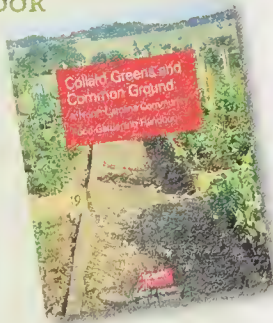
Rudbeckia



Cherrybelle radishes.

A Community Garden Handbook

Don Boekelheide co-wrote “Collard Greens and Common Ground” with NC State Extension Urban Horticulture Specialist Lucy Bradley as a free online North Carolina community gardening handbook. This tool for organizing and managing community gardens in North Carolina covers the entire process, from the first steps in organizing a new community garden to strategies to keep them flourishing over time. Visit bit.ly/NC-commonground for the full online resource.



Interns and volunteers sift compost and plant starts in the biodynamically-managed donation beds at the Dr. John Wilson Community Garden.



10 Steps to Starting a Community Garden

Adapted from the American Community Garden Association's guidelines for launching a successful community garden—visit communitygarden.org for more information on each step:



a great deal of food insecurity. If a church could not only provide community to its congregation, but food as well, it's a win-win for everyone."

Some of the community gardens in NCCGP's network are faith-based, including the Bricks Healthy Lifestyles Garden in Whitakers, which has over seven acres allotted for the growth of food to provide free fresh fruits and vegetables to those in need. There's also the Friendship UMC Community Garden in Cleveland County, which grows vegetables for those in the congregation and "neighbors in need."

If you're interested in starting a community garden—whether you're in a major city or a rural community—McCall advises consulting with the American Community Garden Association's guidelines, which provide helpful tips for getting started (communitygarden.org). Those in rural areas also can be on the lookout for NCCGP educational opportunities in their area (nccgp.org/events), including workshops, events and community garden celebrations.

"Every community garden has a different reason for being. The best tip is that before you start, think of the neighborhood or community the garden will be in, think about that community's assets and desires," McCall says. "If you allow the community's assets and desires to serve one another, you can build something that will last." 🌱

Tina Vasquez is a journalist originally from Los Angeles. She is currently based in Winston-Salem, where she is a full-time immigration reporter. In her spare time, she writes about food.

1 Organize a meeting of interested people.

Determine whether a garden is really needed and wanted, what kind it should be (vegetable, flower, both, organic?), whom it will involve and who benefits.

2 Form a planning committee.

This group can be comprised of people who feel committed to the creation of the garden and have the time to devote to it, at least at this initial stage.

3 Identify all your resources.

Do a community asset assessment. What skills and resources already exist in the community that can aid in the garden's creation?

4 Approach a sponsor.

Some gardens "self-support" through membership dues, but for many, a sponsor is essential for donations of tools, seeds or money.

5 Choose a site.

Consider the amount of daily sunshine (vegetables need at least six hours a day), availability of water, and soil testing for possible pollutants.

6 Prepare and develop the site.

In most cases, the land will need considerable preparation for planting. Organize volunteer work crews to clean it, gather materials and decide on the design and plot arrangement.

7 Organize the garden.

Members must decide how many plots are available and how they will be assigned. Allow space for storing tools, making compost and don't forget the pathways between plots!

8 Plan for children.

Consider creating a special garden just for kids—including them is essential.

9 Determine rules and put them in writing.

The gardeners themselves devise the best ground rules.

10 Help members keep in touch.

Good communication ensures a strong community garden with active participation by all. Community gardens are all about creating and strengthening communities.



Family Gardening

Engage your little sprouts for fun, learning

By Pamela A. Keene



Gardening offers a bumper crop of opportunities for children to learn, play and grow. It's a wonderful way for parents and kids to spend quality time outdoors. It fosters a love of nature and a sense of responsibility of caring for living things. Everyone can see—and eat—the tangible results of their efforts, too.

You'll need gardening tools such as trowels, shovels and rakes. Look for smaller tools that will fit kids' hands, and purchase "real" tools rather than ineffective plastic ones that could easily break.

Start with a small plot to keep it manageable. Stake out a sunny spot because most vegetables and many flowers require at least six hours of sunshine daily. Or, you can have a container garden in a sunny place on your deck or patio. Purchase larger pots with drainage holes, and use good-quality potting soil.

Growing together

Select three or fewer crops for the first year. Try fast-growing vegetables

such as radishes, baby carrots, bush beans or cucumbers. Flowers that offer quick color include marigolds, nasturtiums and zinnias. Blooms with bright colors will attract pollinators to further ensure the success of your vegetable crops, says Kathy Lovett, founder of Gardens on Green in Gainesville, Georgia.

Herbs can be harvested right away, and with proper care, can keep growing all season long.

Joan Casanova, spokesperson with Bonnie Plants, a national vegetable and herb plant supplier, suggests growing the basics like basil, parsley and rosemary but also branching out with novelty herbs such as Thai basil, cinnamon basil or lemon thyme. (For more tips on growing herbs, see "Herbs for Everyone," page 30.)

Let your kids help with easy chores like exploring the dirt for earthworms, digging holes, and placing seeds and plants in the ground.

"This is a shared activity, and it's a chance for kids—and adults—to learn," Lovett says. "Younger ones can

also help with watering the garden and looking for insects as the crops grow."

Further exploration

Take time to read with your kids to explain the science behind gardening. These titles can help: "Green Thumbs: A Kid's Activity Guide to Indoor and Outdoor Gardening" by Laurie Winn Carlson and "Square Food Gardening with Kids" by Mel Bartholomew. Also, "Kid's First Gardening" by Jenny Hendy includes step-by-step activities and crafts for kids ages 5 to 12, and "Gardening Lab for Kids" by Renata Fossen Brown offers more than 50 experiments related to gardening.

You also can introduce your kids to gardening on a larger scale by visiting food festivals and farms. Strawberry and blueberry farms are among operations that offer "you-pick" activities so that your family can harvest fruits and vegetables on-site together. Visit ncfarmfresh.com/farms.asp to find a farm near you. 🌱

Pamela A. Keene is an Atlanta-based freelance writer and avid gardener.



Feel Better, Naturally

These options can help ease your everyday pains

Many people suffer from low-grade aches and pains, especially as they age. Whether their discomfort stems from specific activities or simply from sitting around too much, dealing with ongoing pain can leave them feeling fatigued, impatient and stressed.

Fortunately, there are many ways to ease minor pain and feel better without resorting to conventional pain relievers. Lawrence Rosen, MD, a pediatrician, author and certified trainer of yoga teachers, offers these tips:

1 Curative foods and beverages

Excess weight puts undue stress on joints. Try a diet that promotes joint and tissue health. For a healthy dose of anti-inflammatory zest, add a dash of flaxseeds, rosemary, mustard seed, fresh ginger, turmeric or cayenne pepper to your meals. Green tea, rich in antioxidants, is also thought to lower the risk of arthritis.

2 Supplements

Calcium can help prevent arthritis and osteoporosis in older age.

Omega-3, an essential fatty acid, can lower inflammation.

3 Topical treatment


Try an arnica-based, topical gel or cream, which doesn't have the strong medicine smell of menthol and camphor ingredients. Arnica montana (Latin for mountain daisy), can be used at the first sign of muscle pain, stiffness, swelling from injuries and bruising. Boiron, among several companies that carry it, sells an arnica gel and cream free of fragrances, dyes and parabens.

4 Essential oils

Eucalyptus or lavender in the form of essential oils can be added to a bath to ease minor muscle injuries. Both are often included in packages of Epsom salt for baths. Lavender oil, known also to promote relaxation and sleep, is also often used during massages to help soothe aching tissue and muscles.

5 Mind-Body therapies

Massage, acupuncture, meditation and "mindfulness" are all particularly good therapies for reducing pain. "Yoga and other mindfulness tools have clearly demonstrated benefits for those struggling with chronic pain," Rosen says.

Pain can take its toll on one's physical and mental well-being. Don't resign yourself to needless suffering. Consider alternative ways to feel better. 

—StatePoint

Giggles and tunes

It's no joke—laughter really can be the best medicine. Pain distraction studies have shown that laughing encourages the release of the body's own pain killer, endorphins. Try watching a funny movie the next time you feel achy. Or, reach for your playlist. Listening to music can do wonders for pain.

An Affordable Housing Option

Contemporary features boost appeal of manufactured homes

Whether you are ready to start a family or are a senior who wants a lower mortgage payment, finding a house you can afford to buy can be challenging. One solution is to look past site-built homes to manufactured homes.

Built in a factory and delivered to home sites, this efficient process translates into lower production costs passed on to the consumer. You can quickly see the difference by comparing costs per square foot. According to 2016 data from the United States Census Bureau, the average cost per square foot for a new manufactured home was \$48.42. The average cost per square foot of a site-built new home was \$107.18.

Newer manufactured homes come in a range of architectural styles and exterior finishes, with a variety of floor plans and interior features like vaulted ceilings, fireplaces and state-of-the-art kitchens and baths.

They also feature enhanced energy efficiency in an era of rising energy costs, thanks to upgraded insulation and more efficient heating and cooling systems than homes from decades ago. Buyers can also purchase EnergyStar®-labeled manufactured homes to increase long-term energy savings.

Modern manufactured homes are among the safest housing choices today, as homes must adhere to strict federal building standards. All aspects of construction are continually inspected by professionally trained third parties. Homes feature smoke detectors, and limited combustible materials around furnaces, water heaters and kitchen ranges, as well as wind resistance in areas prone to hurricane-force winds.

Sale prices for manufactured homes can vary, as do site-built homes. The U.S. Census Bureau surveys prices by month, and reports that in the South, the cost of a new single manufactured home averaged \$44,000 and the cost for a doublewide averaged \$85,900 in January 2017. It's possible to get lower prices than these,




however—compare prices online and in person with dealers.

Community amenities

Unfortunately, when many people think of grouped manufactured housing, a run-down trailer park still enters their minds. It's important to know there are many well-run manufactured housing communities that are a far cry from that stereotype, offering welcome amenities such as fitness centers and children's play areas. Other benefits at these communities may include:

- The option to rent an existing home or place your own home there.
- Services, which often include professional property management, care and maintenance of common grounds, as well as trash removal, storage and laundry facilities.

- Control over home and yard improvements.
- Social or activity clubs, scheduled events and recreation amenities.

"The need for quality, affordable housing has never been greater. However, today's manufactured homes are high-quality and cost up to 50 percent less per square foot than conventional site-built homes," says Richard Jennison, president and CEO of the Manufactured Housing Institute. "These savings are allowing more Americans to own a home in the face of an ever-widening housing affordability gap." 

—StatePoint

More home-buying tips


The North Carolina Department of Justice's website (bit.ly/ncdoj-manufacturedhome) provides helpful information for buying a manufactured home.

Savory Seafood

Make a splash with nutritious fish dishes

Whether you are observing Lent and avoiding meat (see sidebar) or are simply seeking wholesome meals, eating seafood is a way to make a positive commitment to health.

Seafood offers unique benefits as a lean protein, provides vitamins D and B12, and is a quality source for omega-3 fatty acids, which are healthy fats essential to human health. The 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends consuming eight ounces, or two servings, of seafood weekly (less for young children).

These easy, flavorful recipes are great for entertaining, too, as well as weekday meals. (If you can't find catfish, or don't like it, you can substitute another white fish such as cod, mahi-mahi or flounder.) For more recipes, visit wildalaskaseafood.com and seafoodnutrition.org. 

—FamilyFeatures.com



Fish on Fridays

Lent is a Christian religious tradition, observed for the period before Easter beginning on Ash Wednesday, which typically calls for a special diet. Red meat is cut out on Fridays for some and for the entirety of Lent for others. According to Datassential, a market research company, 26 percent of consumers observe Lent. Of those, 41 percent said they eat fish on Fridays.



Cedar Plank Grilled Salmon with Sweet Potatoes

- Cedar planks with enough surface area for salmon
- 4 Alaska salmon fillets (4–6 ounces each), fresh, thawed or frozen
- Olive oil spray
- 1 tablespoon fresh (or 1 teaspoon dried) dill, thyme or rosemary
- Salt and freshly cracked pepper, to taste
- 4 large sweet potatoes, sliced lengthwise into wedges
- ½ tablespoon ground cumin

Soak cedar planks for 1 to 2 hours (or overnight) submerged in water. Remove and pat dry.

Heat grill to medium (400 degrees).

If salmon is frozen, rinse ice from it under cold water; pat dry with paper towel. Spray cedar planks and salmon with olive oil spray.

Place salmon on planks; sprinkle with your chosen herb, salt and pepper. Place sweet potatoes in a bowl; spray with cooking spray. Sprinkle with cumin and salt and pepper, to taste. Toss to coat.

Place cedar planks with the salmon and sweet potato wedges on grill. Cover the grill and cook about 3 to 4 minutes; turn sweet potato wedges over and continue cooking until wedges are soft and cooked. Remove them and keep them warm. Cook salmon 12 to 15 minutes, until fish is opaque throughout.

Yield: 4 servings

Blackened Catfish

- 1 tablespoon peanut oil
- 1 pound catfish, cut into four fillets
- 5 tablespoons Blackened Seasoning

Seasoning

- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 tablespoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon cayenne pepper
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon thyme

For seasoning, mix together salt, pepper, cayenne pepper, garlic powder and thyme.

Heat cast-iron skillet to medium-high heat with 1 tablespoon peanut oil added. Coat both sides of catfish fillets with seasoning. Add catfish to skillet and cook 5 to 6 minutes per side, or until well done.

Yield: 4 servings

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Herbs for Everyone

Add these hearty kitchen necessities to any garden

By Leah Chester-Davis

Herbs are plants that are hard to resist. They lend beauty, whether in the landscape or in a container on a patio. And they have many uses. A wide range of herbs will grow in North Carolina's climate, from the mountains to the coast, offering lots of options, depending on your interests. Some are used medicinally. Others are used for fragrance or insect repellents in potpourris and sachets. When it comes to adding flair and flavor to a culinary dish, there's nothing like fresh-picked herbs out of your garden.

"Everyone should have a kitchen garden," says John Wrenn of J&B Herb and Plant Farm in Roxboro. "Rosemary, thyme, parsley, sage, basil, tarragon, mints have many culinary and medicinal qualities."

A certified organic grower of about 120 different kinds of herbs, Wrenn and his business partner Burton Edwards grow culinary and medicinal herbs for their own use, as well as to sell to Whole Foods and more than 200 independent garden centers and hardware stores. Edwards usually travels the herb and gardening festival circuit in three states to sell herbs.

*Above: Rows of herbs on display at the State Farmers Market.
Below: Parsley, tarragon, cilantro and basil fill baskets.*



Worthy garden additions

Because herbs are relatively easy to grow in any climate, it's worth adding them to your gardening mix.

"I always recommend people start with the basic kitchen herbs such as rosemary, thyme, sage, parsley, oregano, basil and a good mint," he says. "But any herb that is for culinary use is indispensable. Look at your grocer's spice section. It's mainly herbs, and nothing beats the freshness of a fresh-cut herb to include in a recipe."

The simplest ingredients—think fresh-picked tomatoes, olive oil, salt and pepper—are transformed with the addition of fresh basil leaves. Olive oil and fresh rosemary tossed with potatoes and then roasted elevate the dish to divine status. Often less salt is required due to the flavor punch that herbs add.

Herb planting tips

"Herbs are full-sun plants that like good drainage," Wrenn explains. He attributes that to areas in the world where most herbs originate, which is usually a dry, sunny, sandy location.

While many coastal areas are ideal for herbs, according to Wrenn, too-sandy soil may need to be amended, as well as the clay-based soil in the Piedmont. In the mountain areas, some herbs that might make it in the Piedmont as a perennial may not be able to survive cold, windy mountain winters.

When planting, herbs will thrive in average soil with organic matter such as compost added to improve drainage and soil nutrients. Herbs dislike wet feet. Avoid areas where water stands or where there may be heavy runoff. Select a site that receives at least six hours of sun each day. The best bet when dealing with difficult soils may be to use raised beds (see "Gardeners: Give Yourself a Raise," page 20).

Herbs will require little to no watering once established in the landscape.

"Herbs can do very well in containers," Wrenn says,

“and you need not worry about watering them on a daily basis. Pick the spot in your yard that gets the most sun, and just go for it.”

He suggests planting herbs among vegetables as insect repellents. If the soil has been amended with compost, they may not need any added fertilizer. Most herbs thrive without it. If adding fertilizer, do so sparingly.

Get growing

Don't just dream about an herb garden—plant one! Even if you don't have a garden plot, surely you have space for a container, and many herbs will be happy to take up residence there. Place the container in a sunny spot and you'll be rewarded with herbs through the summer and into fall.

This spring, take advantage of one of the many herb festivals (see sidebar) or farmers markets (ncfarmfresh.com) across the state to talk with growers and to find a large selection from which to choose your herb garden favorites. 🌿

Leah Chester-Davis loves to explore North Carolina. Her business, Chester-Davis Communications (chester-davis.com), specializes in food, farm, gardening and lifestyle brands and organizations.



Top: A variety of herbs at J&B in Roxboro.

Bottom: Lavender can spice up your herb garden with its lovely fragrance, and tolerates heat and dry spells when well rooted.

“Everyone should have a kitchen garden. Rosemary, thyme, parsley, sage, basil, tarragon, mints have many culinary and medicinal qualities.”



Upcoming Herb Festivals

Herb festivals across the state help usher in the gardening season each year. Here are a few 2018 festivals to consider (updated from “Spring herb festivals help kick off gardening season,” March 2016, page 36):

26th Annual Herb & Garden Fair

April 7 & 8 | Poplar Grove Plantation, Wilmington
910-686-9518 | poplargrove.org/festivals

The area's largest garden event features plants, classes and activities on gardening. In addition, perennials, annuals, hanging baskets, shrubs, native plants, vegetable starts and houseplants are also available along with garden art, accessories, herbal products, artisan crafts and local food.

2018 Spring Herb & Plant Festival

April 14 | Cabarrus County Fairgrounds, Concord
704-920-3310 | cabarrus.ces.ncsu.edu

More than 85 vendors showcase herbs, other plants and garden accessories at a new location for 2018. Master Gardener volunteers will be on hand to answer gardening questions.

29th Annual Asheville Spring Herb Festival

May 4–6 | WNC Farmers Market, Asheville
828-253-1691 | wncherbfestival.com

Considered by many growers and festival visitors to be the “granddaddy of them all,” the Asheville Herb Festival, one of the largest in the country, features hundreds of herb varieties, herbal medicine, gourmet cooking herbs, organic seeds, heirloom vegetable starts and gardening advice from Buncombe County Master Gardeners.

The South's Gardening Guru

Mark Weathington is working to get the best plants to NC homes

By Leah Chester-Davis



Mark Weathington loves plants. He studies them, evaluates them, talks about them, and travels across the country and around the globe hunting for species that might be valuable in plant breeding or as the next great plant for your garden.

As the director of the JC Raulston Arboretum (JCRA) at NC State University, Weathington is instrumental in helping the North Carolina nursery and green industry remain one of the strongest in the country by evaluating plants and working with nurseries to get the best plants into home landscapes.

Spreading the joy of gardening

While his work puts him in close contact with the nursery industry, equally important is his work educating the public about great plants and gardening.

"We try to create a real community of gardeners, starting with young children," Weathington explains as he talks about the myriad educational offerings of the JCRA. Classes and workshop opportunities extend through all grades and include adult education.

Even though this plantsman

Learn more online

Visit markweathington.com for information on lectures that Weathington presents statewide.

The JC Raulston Arboretum has several online resources at jcra.ncsu.edu.

serves at the helm of the nationally acclaimed evaluation garden (a 10.5-acre plant-lovers' mecca that is jam-packed with a diverse collection of landscape plants), his persona is low-key and approachable. He clearly wants people to enjoy gardening.

Weathington has experience to draw on. He has lived across the South and received his horticulture degrees from Virginia Tech (he took a plant propagation class on a lark and immediately—though unexpectedly—knew that he had found his passion). He worked at a nursery in the mountains, and later had stints at the Atlanta Botanical Garden and Norfolk Botanical Garden in coastal Virginia. His knowledge and gardening experience in the mountains, Piedmont, and coast provide the basis for growing advice, plant picks and other recommendations.

Plantsman-turned-author

Weathington's first book, "Gardening in the South: The Complete Homeowner's Guide," was published last May by Timber Press. How does a man who knows and loves plants narrow thousands of plant possibilities into a book?

"Writing the book was easy. Selecting the plants was just about impossible," Weathington says. "I did not want to write about the same 100 plants you find in any book for the eastern two-thirds of the United States. I wanted to branch out and introduce people to some newer

Weathington ventured to New Zealand in 2013 on a plant collecting trip, as well as to speak at the Global Botanic Gardens Congress. He also stopped by this Hobbit hole on the set of the *Lord of the Rings*.

plants or different ones or perhaps underutilized plants."


Weathington's process was to start "with a list of plants that I thought would be interesting" and share it with horticultural colleagues across the South to get their feedback. The resulting list was 600 plants, which his publisher made him pare to 300. He ended up with well-performing plants in eight categories that he calls the Southeast plant palette. He also includes information on plants for problem spots, design inspirations and Southeast gardening practices.

"I have a confession to make," he says. "I am a lazy gardener. I love plants. I love gardening but I love a lot of other things, too, and I don't want to spend all my time in the garden. But I want a beautiful and interesting home landscape. It was my goal to write a book that empowered people, both current gardeners and newbies, to get out and plant some things."

While his book is chock-full of worthy plants to consider, Weathington admits he is quite fond of *Osmanthus fragrans*. "It's such a fantastic plant and one that is always in my landscape."

"Chinese Fringe Tree is a phenomenal, tough small tree," he adds. "That's one I often recommend to people."

He admits being partial to weeping or pendulous plants, which may very well be the subject of his next book. Among those mentioned in his current book are the weeping versions of Katsura tree, redbuds and Norway spruce.

"Gardening is fun. It's healthy. Gardeners stay so young," he enthuses. "We have volunteers out here [at JCRA] who are 70-plus years old who are working probably harder than I can. It's really amazing to me how young gardening keeps you. It's one of the most rewarding things that people can do." 

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The itsy, bitsy spider climbed up my window screen.

Until I got new windows installed, there was a little spider that lived in my office window between the glass and screen. I am sure it kept me company for well over a year, maybe two.

One day, as I watched it traveling up and down its enclosed environment, I wondered: “How long do spiders live, anyway?” After a little research, I learned it depends. It depends on the gender and species of the spider.

Female spiders can live from two to more than 25 years, generally outliving males—in part because some female spiders eat the male after mating.

Wolf spiders like hanging out on my patio. They come out at night and prey on bugs attracted by the light. Wolf spiders get big, and the Carolina wolf spider (*Hogna carolinensis*) is the largest of all, according to Orkin (the pest control people). I mistook them for mice in the tack room when I had a horse stable. So, I’ve learned to leave the patio light off, discouraging those big, creepy spiders.

The male wolf spider is lucky if he lives more than one year (female wolf spiders are one of the types with that unfortunate mating habit). The female carries her eggs around with her and the babies stay attached to their mommies for a couple of weeks after they hatch. It is weird to kill a mama wolf spider, only to have dozens of tiny ones go scampering all over the place. The female, if she isn’t squashed by a human or eaten by a bird, goes on to live three or more years. Some people keep them as pets and in captivity they can live up to four years.

Female spiders can live from two to more than 25 years, generally outliving males—in part because some female spiders eat the male after mating.

How Long do Spiders Live?

And other spider facts

By Donna Campbell Smith



Sadly, the beautiful black and yellow garden spider only lives one season.

There was research done in France in which wolf spiders were drowned. They “came back to life” after being removed from the water to dry out (they can slip into a kind of coma for up to 40 hours). So, flushing one down the toilet is probably not the best way to remove a wolf spider.

Sadly, the beautiful black and yellow garden spider (*Argiope aurantia*, aka my favorite) only lives one season. Both female and males die when the weather becomes cold. The exception is if they live in a year-round warm climate or in captivity, then they can live several years.

The notorious black widow (genus *Latrodectus*) lives one to three years. They like to hang out in dark places and their bite can make you very sick. Its venom is 15 times more poisonous than that of a rattlesnake bite, according to the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service. It can be deadly, especially for young children and the elderly.

I was surprised to learn that some tarantulas live longer than dogs or even horses. The female, that is; the males rarely make it to two years. The

female, on the other hand, can live for as long as 40 years. The record was 49 years! So, if you are into creepy pets, a female tarantula is one you will have around longer than your four-legged friends. They are not deadly, but their bites do cause severe pain. They can also “throw” barbed hairs when threatened, which cause skin irritation.

I think, judging by the long funnel-like web it built, my spider was a funnel-web house spider (genus *Agelenopsis*). They are harmless. I estimate it was about a half-inch or less from front to back. I don’t think it ever left its habitat between the screen and glass of my window until the window was replaced.

I missed watching my spider and wondered if it was still alive. That was until a few days ago, when I saw a spider crawling across my desk. It looked like my little friend. I considered letting it inside my new window. But, instead I let it go on its way, hoping it will live a full life, whatever that may be for my spider. ☐

Donna Campbell Smith is a Carolina Country contributing writer who lives in Franklin County.

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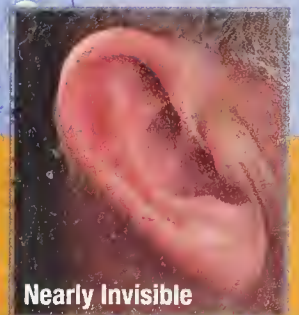
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Multiple entries from the same person will be disqualified.

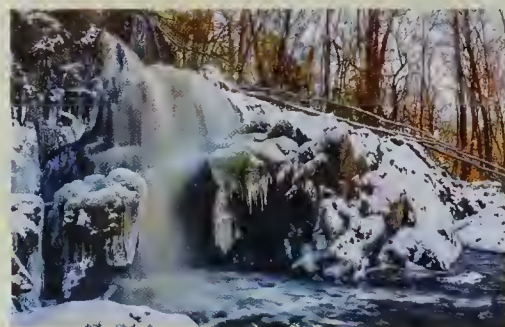
The winner, chosen at random and announced in our April issue, will receive \$25.

Have a roadside gem you'd like to share?

Submit a photo, plus a brief description and general location information, at carolinacountry.com/where.

February winner

The February Where Is This photo from Lumbee River EMC member Glenn Poplin features the waterfall located behind the Great Falls Mills ruins off Highway 74 in Rockingham. Built in 1869 on the site of the former Richmond Mill, this textile mill processed cotton until the 1930s, then was used for storage before burning down in 1972. The band Hootie & the Blowfish filmed a music video at the site in the 1990s. The mill is located on private property. The winning entry chosen at random from all the correct submissions came from Tom Nash of Concord, a Union Power Cooperative member.



CAROLINA COUNTRY scenes Photo of the month

Oceanview Explorer

On an Outer Banks beach near Frisco, I captured this shot with the Milky Way in the background. My walking staff was placed in the sand so that I knew where I would end up in the shot, although the waves almost washed it away. I felt like a fisherman of old contemplating the day's catch.

*Dale Brandt, South Mills
A member of Albemarle EMC*

The Photo of the Month comes from those who scored an honorable mention from the judges in our 2018 photo contest ("Carolina Country Scenes," January 2018). See even more Photos of the Week on our website carolinacountry.com.



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**Stan W. US war veteran
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All American Marathon
March 25, Fayetteville

MOUNTAINS

James & the Giant Peach: A Magical Puppet Adventure

March 2-3, Franklin
866-273-4615
greatmountainmusic.com

Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver

Seminary scholarship concert
March 9, Statesville
704-881-2532

Weddings Pop Up Show

Caterers, planners
March 10, Spruce Pine
828-765-9033
blueridgeweddingsnc.com

Spring Fest Craft Show

March 10, Burnsville
828-208-6975
burnsvilletowncenter.com

The Day He Wore My Crown

Musical celebration of Easter
March 23-24, Franklin
866-273-4615
greatmountainmusic.com

Spring Sip & Shop

Wine, demos, crafts
March 23-24, Asheville
828-253-7651
grovewood.com

Gem & Mineral Show

Displays, jewelry, activities
March 23-25, Hickory
828-446-5400
cvgmc.com

Easter Egg Festival

Bunny visit, hunt
Mar. 24, Blowing Rock
828-295-5222
blowingrock.com

ONGOING

Art in the Hall

Juried quilters show
Through March 23, Morganton
828-438-5362
morgantonnc.gov

PIEDMONT

Art Show Reception

Kim Langlois & Jane Phillips
March 2, Roxboro
336-597-1709
kirbytheater.com

The Marquis Slam

Poetry competition
March 3, Fayetteville
910-483-5311
facebook.com/TheMarquisSlam

Glassfest

March 3, Star
910-428-9001
starworksnc.org

Cole Swindell

Country music
March 9, Fayetteville
910-438-4100
crowncomplexnc.com

The Young Irelanders

Irish dance, music
March 9, Lumberton
910-738-4339
carolinaciviccenter.com

Americana Concert

Includes solo performance
March 10, Fayetteville
910-433-4690
fayettevillesymphony.org

Dr. Seuss Parade

Photos, games
March 10, Spring Lake
910-797-9568
bit.ly/fb-seuss-parade

Highfalls Old-Time Fiddlers' Convention

March 10, Robbins
910-464-3600
ncmcs.org/domain/753

Nancy Peacock

Book reading, reception
March 11, Hillsborough
919-732-5001
hillsboroughgallery.com

Celtic Woman: Homecoming Live

Musical, cultural celebration
March 15, Fayetteville
910-438-4100
crowncomplexnc.com

Cape Fear Wildlife Expo

Decoy displays, turkey calls
March 16-18, Fayetteville
910-795-0292
capefearwildlifeexpo.com

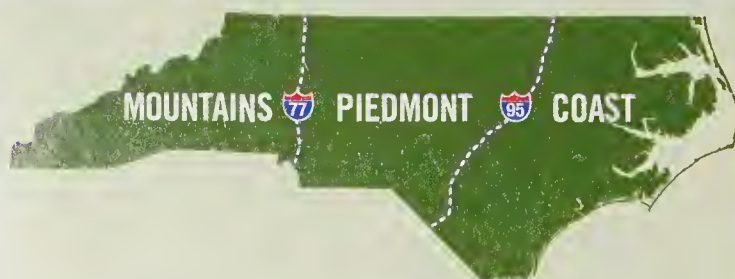
Wine & Pottery Show

Tastings, tours
March 17, Vale
704-276-9911
woodmillwinery.com



carolinacountry.com/calendar

See more events online with photos, descriptions, maps and directions.



Listing Deadlines:

for May: March 25

for June: April 25

Submit Listings Online:

carolinacountry.com/calendar

(No email or U.S. Mail.)



Nancy Peacock
March 11, Hillsborough



Know Before You Go

In case something changes after Carolina Country goes to press, check information from the contact listed.

Harlem Globetrotters

Ball-handling wizardry
March 22, Fayetteville
910-438-4100
crowncomplexnc.com

Carolina FiberFest

Demos, vendors
March 23–24, Raleigh
919-222-8067
carolinafiberfest.org

Master Gardeners Spring Symposium

Speakers, vendors
March 24, Fayetteville
910-868-5405
bit.ly/master-gardener-symposium

All American Marathon

March 25, Fayetteville
910-907-3616
allamericanmarathon.com

Doris Betts Writers Festival

Authors include Wiley Cash
March 30–31, Statesville
704-878-4349
bpressley@mitchellcc.edu

ONGOING

Disgraced

Play about identity
March 15–25, Fayetteville
910-323-4233
cfrt.org

Rock—Paper—Scissors

Jewelry, fiber art, sculpture
March 26–April 22, Hillsborough
919-732-5001
hillsboroughgallery.com

COAST

Coastal Consumer Showcase

Samples, auction
March 1, St. James
910-457-6964
southport-oakisland.com

Home & Living Expo

Builders, contractors
March 3, Greenville
252-321-7671
www.pitthba.com

Harpeth Rising

Genre-bending trio
March 8, Oriental
252-617-2125
pamlicomusic.org

Coastal Living Show

Gifts, products, services
March 24, Wilmington
910-395-1464
coastallivingshow.com

Breakfast with Easter Bunny

Pancakes, egg hunt
March 31, Edenton
252-482-2637
visitedenton.com

ONGOING

Young at Heart

Student art show
March 5–24, Hertford
252-426-3041
perquimansarts.org

Our Risen Savior

Easter show, lunch
March 24–April 17, Edenton
252-482-0300
edentonchowan@outlook.com



There are more than 250 farmers markets in North Carolina, and some stay open year-round. For one near you, visit bit.ly/NCfarmmarkets.



Chris Charles

MARCH'S FEATURED TRACK

"Walking the Floor Over You"

By The Malpass Brothers

Known for their sharp stylings of classic country, this retro-devoted pair have a new album out that includes a zingy, toe-tapping cover of "Walking The Floor Over You." (Other standout tracks include "I Can't Keep You In Love With Me," "Memory That Bad" and "Mama's Prayers.") Chris and Taylor Malpass recorded the album, "Live at the Paramount Theatre," at their annual performance in Goldsboro, their hometown.



carolinacountry.com/music

Listen to this and past featured tracks from North Carolina musicians.



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1/2"	62431/239/63882	\$84.97

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MODEL: H20TWA

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LIFETIME WARRANTY

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MODEL: 76377

ITEM 62859/63055 62860 shown

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UFO: Unusual Food Oddity

Patty Pan Squash

Story and photos by L.A. Jackson

Summer squash aficionados will often debate the merits of straight-neck squash verses crook-neck—while occasionally adding zucchini to the conversation—just to seem intellectually inclusive. However, there is a fourth, although weird, choice: patty pan squash.

Patty pan squash, also called scalloped squash, might look like it was grown on Mars, but it is actually an old veggie that has been harvested from American veggie gardens since Colonial times. In appearance, it is flat, round and has wavy edges: think of Grandma's pies or a flying saucer. But as odd as patty pan looks, it sure is tasty. I have found it to be slightly sweeter than regular squash.

This unusual squash is grown the usual squash way. In Carolina gardens, patty pans can be started around the middle to end of April, which gives you plenty of time to order seeds. Want easy-to-find selections? Well, if you are into 17th

century gardening, the heirloom “Early White Bush” is one of the originals, with the pale “Peter Pan” (an All-American Selections winner) having a similar look. Prefer your edible UFOs more sassy? “Sunburst” comes in a sizzling yellow, only slightly cooled with a splotch of rich green.

March is a good time to prepare a place for patty pans in the vegetable garden. Pick a sunny, well-draining site and turn over the soil, mixing in plenty of organic matter such as compost, rotted manure or bagged commercial topsoil. Plantings should be spaced about 2 to 3 feet apart. By the middle to end of May, with seasonal heat on the rise, add 2 to 3 inches of organic mulch around the plants to help stabilize both soil temperature and ground moisture. Patty pans should be picked when they are about 3 to 4 inches in diameter.

Bugs that afflict common squash such as vine borers, aphids, squash bugs and pickleworms can also bother



Patty pan squash

patty pans. For defense, natural, low toxic pesticides such as Neem oil or insecticidal soap are good bug boppers to try.

As far as how to eat this strange squash, cut-up and either sautéed, grilled, fried or steamed, it's going to be a treat. Also, search online for baking recipes—many hollow out the patty pan centers, refill with goodies such as onions, herbs, mushrooms, cheese and bacon, and cook them in the oven. Very yummy! 🍽️

L.A. Jackson is the former editor of *Carolina Gardener* magazine. Contact L.A. at la.jackson1@gmail.com.



Mock orange

Garden To-Do's for March

Spring is a time of rejuvenation, refreshment and rebirth in the garden. Proper prunings can certainly encourage new plant growth—but they must be timed correctly. In particular, wait until such early-blooming beauties as Carolina jessamine, azalea, weigela, deciduous magnolia, forsythia, flowering quince, kerria, winter daphne, redbud, dogwood, fringe tree, mock orange, spirea, snowball viburnum and camellia (*Camellia japonica*) have finished their fabulous flower shows before pruning.

- ☐ While waiting to plant patty pan squash, this month is a good time to sow the seeds of early bird veggies such as spinach, radishes, turnips, kale, garden peas and lettuce as well as potato tubers.
- ☐ After the threat of hard freezes is over, rake up and replace winter mulch around roses with a fresh organic covering for the new growing season.
- ☐ Leave short pieces of string or yarn around the bird feeder now—your winged friends will really appreciate the extra nest-building material!
- ☐ Disconnect the spark plug on your lawn mower and examine the blade. If its edges are dull, have it sharpened or replaced at a mower repair shop. A sharp blade slices grass blades cleanly, while a dull one rips and tears, which encourages lawn diseases to come out and play.



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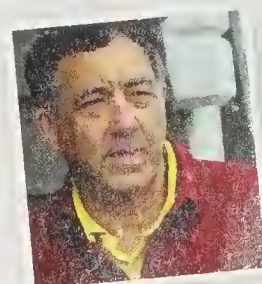
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WHAT OUR LANDOWNERS HAVE TO SAY

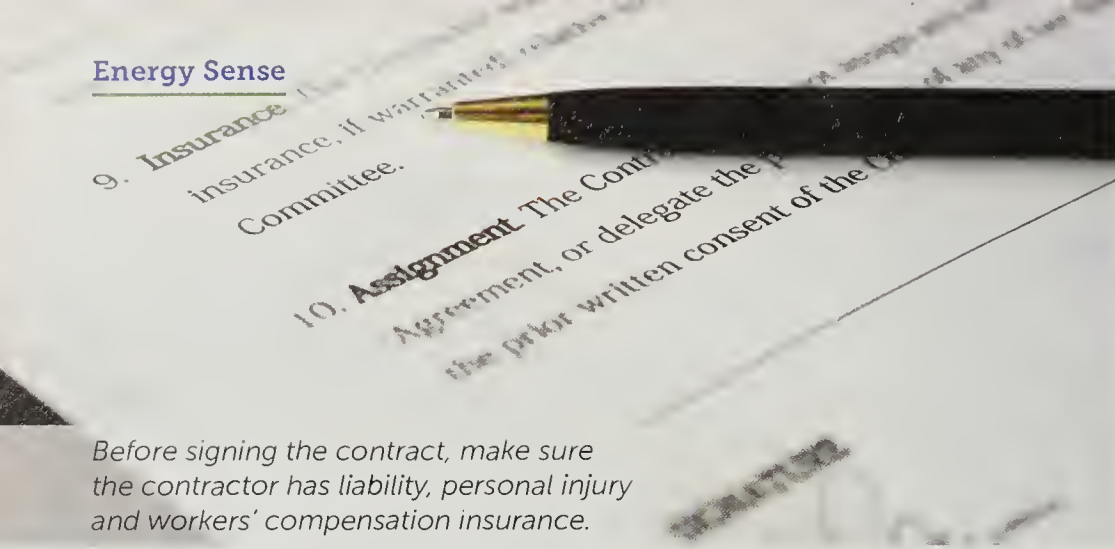
"Outdoor Access allows me to share my property with people. The members have all been really nice people. They have been very respectful of me and my neighbors."

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-Jim L. Loudoun County, VA



*Monday - Friday, 8am - 5pm



Before signing the contract, make sure the contractor has liability, personal injury and workers' compensation insurance.



An energy auditor can help you determine the scope of work and may be able to suggest contractors.

Hiring the Right Contractor

By Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen

Renovations can be the perfect time to improve your home's energy efficiency. But how can ensure you hire a contractor who will do a good job and stay within budget? To make sure you get those energy savings, it's important to do some planning right from the beginning.

The first step is to educate yourself so you can be in control of your project. Helpful, easy-to-understand energy efficiency information is available for virtually any area of your home and any renovation project. Just be sure to use reputable sources, like energy.gov, energystar.gov or your local electric co-op.

You'll need that knowledge so you can judge the solutions each potential contractor proposes. Some products or methods sold as effective energy efficiency solutions may not work as well as they claim, or may be too expensive relative to the energy savings they provide.

It's important to talk to your local building department to find out if your project requires a permit and inspections. Some contractors may suggest doing the work without a permit, but unpermitted work can cause problems if you need to file an insurance claim down the road or when you get ready to sell your home.

You also can use your newfound knowledge to ask the right questions of potential contractors. Ask about the product to be installed, the energy savings it should yield and whether it will improve comfort. Because

energy efficiency installations and construction are specialized, most measures are unlikely to be installed correctly unless the installer has experience and hopefully some appropriate training or certification.

Finding a contractor can be a challenge, especially in rural areas. To find them, use your online search engine to "find a contractor in your area." If you're in a sparsely-populated area, the right contractor may be located an hour or two away. Your electric co-op may be able to provide a list of approved contractors in your area. You can also check with a local energy auditor for contractor names.

You may decide you'd like to hire a small specialty contractor or a larger general contractor. Either way, it's crucial to hire someone with a contractor's license, a local business license and three types of insurance: liability, personal injury and workers' compensation. Check references to verify the contractor has a solid history of cost-control, timeliness, good communication and excellent results, including significant energy savings. You might learn that your lowest bidder has a tendency to increase the price after the job has begun.


As you choose between contractors, quality should be an even more important consideration than price. Poor-quality energy efficiency work will not deliver maximum savings.

Once you have settled on a contractor, be sure to get a written contract. It should cover "as built" details and specifications that include

energy performance ratings you have researched ahead of time, such as:

- Name of the individual doing the installation;
- Specific R value, if you're insulating;
- Make, model, the AFUE (annual fuel use efficiency) and COP (coefficient of performance) ratings if you're replacing a furnace (and ask that an efficiency test be conducted before and after the work);
- Make, model and EER (energy efficient ratio) rating if you are replacing the air conditioner (some contractors are able to check for duct leakage in the supply and return ductwork with a duct blaster if you're doing any furnace or AC work); and
- Whether the contractor must pay for the necessary building permits.

Finally, be cautious about pre-paying. Keep the upfront payment as low as possible, set benchmarks the contractor must meet to receive the next payment and make sure a reasonable amount of the payment is not due until the project is completed, passes building inspections and you are fully satisfied. If you don't feel qualified to approve the project, you could even require testing or inspection by an independent energy auditor.

Then, enjoy your new energy efficient space! 

This column was co-written by Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency. Visit carolinacountry.com/your-energy for more ideas on energy efficiency.



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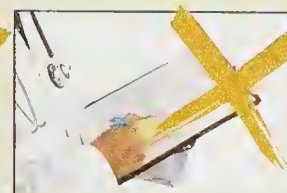
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Energy-Saving Congregations

Create a plan to make energy improvements at your house of worship

By Hannah McKenzie



Q: I have seen measurable savings from making energy upgrades around my home, but I am curious about the potential for savings in another kind of house...a house of worship. As an active member of my church, I see opportunities for energy savings but am unsure how to get started.

A: Assessing and updating a congregation's facility can be a challenging prospect when the buildings are more complex than our homes. There are also many people we need to appease and collaborate with. Despite the challenges, however, congregations across the country have been eager to consider and implement projects to save energy. Stewardship and caring for the earth are often motivating factors, in addition to saving money. When less money is spent paying utility bills, more can be dedicated to meaningful faith-based endeavors. An excellent resource for clergy, staff and laypersons is the Energy Star® Workbook for Congregations (energystar.gov/congregations), which focuses on ways to implement realistic and cost-effective energy improvement projects. The booklet offers guidance on the following steps:

1 **Inquire.**

Talk with people in your congregation—including youth—to gauge interest in and motivations for saving energy. This knowledge will help you craft a plan forward. Assemble a “green team” of enthusiastic and knowledgeable congregation members.

2 **Assess.**

Collect 12 months of utility bills, and walk around the facility noting lights, equipment, appliances and HVAC systems. Knowing what you have, when high bills occur and what items cost to operate and maintain will help identify cost-effective changes. The Appendix to the Energy Star Workbook for Congregations provides a detailed guide for this large and crucial task.

3 **Set Goals.**

Use the facility assessment and feedback from your congregation, clergy and staff to determine what you

hope to achieve. Prioritize and set a timeline. As with our homes, we often spend money making energy efficiency upgrades, but simple habit changes like turning off lights and setting back the thermostat cost nothing. When replacing old appliances, lights, plumbing fixtures or HVAC equipment, consider energy efficient options and see if any incentives or rebates are available from your local utility providers.

4 **Take Action.**

Divide and conquer by delegating responsibilities. Some tasks can be tackled by congregation members, while others will need hired contractors or experts.

5 **Evaluate.**

Measure and verify energy savings for each item you address. Share the results with your congregation as often as possible, and make the connection that every dollar saved increases funds available for other meaningful missions.

6 **Celebrate.**

Keep momentum and spirits high by celebrating and publicizing what your congregation has achieved. You will likely inspire other congregations with your story.

After energy efficiency upgrades have been exhausted, renewable energy options could be worth exploring. Contact your local electric cooperative to find out what might make the most sense for your house of worship.

Many faith traditions have a calling to care for creation in a variety of ways—whether it is caring for animals, plants, air, soil, water or one another. Using energy wisely is a cost-effective step to reduce our use of natural resources. Tap into what motivates your congregation and get started. **C**

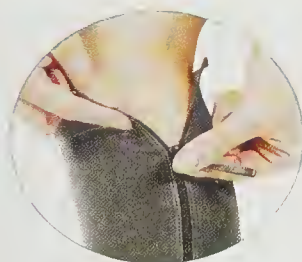
Hannah McKenzie is a building science consultant for Advanced Energy in Raleigh.

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Spring Green Veggie-Pasta Salad

This vibrant make-ahead green salad is crispy, a little bit cheesy and exact measurements aren't necessary. The salad will keep up to a week so you can easily make ahead.

- 1 (20 ounce) package refrigerated cheese tortellini
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 2 cups fresh sugar snap peas
- 2 cups fresh snow peas
- 1 bunch (about 1 pound) fresh asparagus, sliced into 1-inch pieces
- 1 (13 ounce) bag frozen sweet garden peas, thawed
- 2 bunches green onion, sliced
- Sprigs of dill, sprouts or pea shoots for garnish, optional

+ carolinacountry.com/recipes

Top this salad with a homemade citrus-dill dressing. Recipe available on our website.

Cook pasta according to package directions.

Remove from the water with slotted spoon into colander and let water continue to boil. Drain well and toss with 2 tablespoons of oil (to prevent sticking together) and refrigerate.

Put sugar snap peas into the boiling water and blanch for about 2 minutes. Remove into colander with slotted spoon and cool with cold running tap water. Repeat blanching/cooling process with the snow peas, then asparagus. When snow peas have cooled to touch, slice into slivers. Blot all with paper towel, then refrigerate several hours or up to 2 days before assembling. Blot thawed peas with paper towels to remove any moisture (but do not cook).

In a large mixing bowl combine pasta with all peas, asparagus and onion. Garnish and toss with a vinaigrette at serving time.

Yield: 12-16 servings

Sweet Potato Shepherd's Pie with Southern Country Ham

It's March, and we have St. Patrick's Day on our mind. As winter's chilly days wind down, let's enjoy one last comforting stick-to-your-ribs savory pie. (Note: You need to cook the butterbeans and sweet potato ahead of time to be ready to throw this pie together!)

Cooking oil

- 1 lb. center cut country ham, cut in ½-inch bites (we used Johnston County Hams)
- 8 cups chopped cabbage
- 6 leeks, trimmed, washed and thin-sliced
- 4 small carrots, shaved
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 2 cups cooked butterbeans
- 1 can (15-ounce) creamed corn
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- Paprika

Topping

- 3 cups cooked sweet potato
- 2 cups grated cheddar cheese
- 6 tablespoons honey



Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Lightly coat a large deep ovenproof skillet with oil. Sear ham over medium-high heat, stirring as it cooks, for 2 minutes. Remove with slotted spoon. Add cabbage, leeks, carrots and red pepper. Sauté until crisp-tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in butterbeans, corn, thyme and ham.

Spoon topping over mixture and dust with paprika. Place into oven and bake 25 to 30 minutes until bubbly and cheese has melted in the potatoes.

Yield: About 6 servings



From Your Kitchen

Fabulous Crab Dip/Fondue

- 5 ounces cheddar cheese
- 8 ounces cream cheese
- ¼ cup half-and-half
- 1 can (4½ ounces) lump crab meat, drained
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder

Combine the cheddar cheese, cream cheese and half-and-half, and melt in microwave. Stir until all is melted and combined.

Add crab meat and spices. Microwave an additional 2 minutes. Stir well.

Serve hot with Fritos, pita triangles, crackers or other cracker of your choice. Can be made ahead and frozen.

*Recipe courtesy of Sylvia Hines, Greenville
A member of Carteret-Craven
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—Jenny Lloyd, recipes editor

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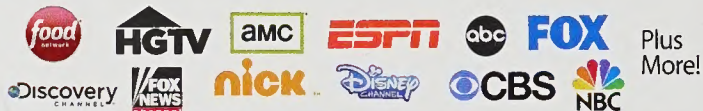
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*Prices include Hopper Duo for qualifying customers. Hopper, Hopper w/Sling or Hopper 3 \$5/mo. more. Upfront fees may apply based on credit qualification. Fees apply for additional TVs: Hopper \$15/mo., Joey \$5/mo., Super Joey \$10/mo. All offers require credit qualification, 2-Year commitment with early termination fee and eAutoPay. Offer for new and qualifying former customers only. Important Terms and Conditions: Qualification: Advertised price requires credit qualification and eAutoPay. Upfront activation and/or receiver upgrade fees may apply based on credit qualification. Offer ends 4/9/18. 2-Year Commitment: Early termination fee of \$20/mo. remaining applies if you cancel early. Included in 2-year price guarantee at \$59.99 advertised price: America's Top 120 programming package, local channels, HD service fees, and Hopper Duo for 1 TV. Included in 2-year price guarantee for additional cost: Programming package upgrades (\$69.99 for AT120+, \$79.99 for AT200, \$89.99 for AT250), monthly fees for upgraded or additional receivers (\$5-\$7 per additional TV, receivers with additional functionality may be \$10-\$15). NOT included in 2-year price guarantee or advertised price (and subject to change): Taxes & surcharges, add-on programming (including premium channels), DISH Protect, and transactional fees. Premium Channels: 3 Mos. Free. After 3 mos., you will be billed \$55/mo. for HBO, Cinemax, Showtime, Starz and DISH Movie Pack unless you call to cancel. Gift and Pre-paid Cards: Courtesy of GoDISH.com for credit-qualified customers. Customers who do not qualify may be eligible for a secondary gift offer. Cards are issued by Citibank, N.A. pursuant to a license from Visa® U.S.A. Inc. and managed by Citi Prepaid Services. Cards will not have cash access and can be used everywhere Visa® debit cards are accepted. Cards expire 6 months from date issued. Mail-in redemption form is required within 60 days of qualified activation to receive gift. Customer account must be current and in good standing at the time of redemption. Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of gift. Other: Netflix streaming membership required. All packages, programming, features, and functionality and all prices and fees not included in price lock are subject to change without notice. After 6 mos., if selected you will be billed \$8.99/mo. for DISH Protect Silver unless you call to cancel. After 2 years, then-current everyday prices for all services apply. For business customers, additional monthly fees may apply. Free standard professional installation only. HBO®, Cinemax® and related channels and service marks are the property of Home Box Office, Inc. SHOWTIME is a registered trademark of Showtime Networks Inc., a CBS Company. STARZ and related channels and service marks are property of Starz Entertainment, LLC. © 2018 GoDISH.com. All rights reserved. Internet speeds, prices, and providers vary by customer address. \$49.99 price refers to 25Mbps plan. Restrictions apply. 25 Mbps internet service available nationwide, but may become temporarily unavailable to certain addresses based on local beam capacity. Availability is subject to change without notice. Call for details.